

Improving Clarity on Collaboration and Consensus Building Processes: The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Future of Collaboration and Consensus on Public Issues

In 2006, CBI's founder, Larry Susskind, and CBI partner-consultant, Suzanne Orenstein, recognized the need for professionals working to apply various methods of consensus and collaboration on public issues to come together to discuss commonalities among their various approaches and future directions for collaborative approaches. Following a very successful Association for Conflict Resolution conference on deliberative democracy and its links to public policy consensus building, Susskind and Orenstein convened a group of leaders of organizations working to improve dialogue, deliberation, collaboration, and consensus building to explore common approaches and principles. The group met in person and by conference call several times over two years, and produced a consensus vision for collaboration and agreement on principles and prerequisites for effective collaborative work.

Vision: The vision of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Future of Collaboration and Consensus is for **inclusive, effective, and fair collaboration to become a routine part of governance and civic life.** Increasing the use of collaborative practices can help achieve a fairer and more inclusive society, which will strengthen democracy and result in better decisions being made and implemented.

Working Group Members and Mission: The Ad Hoc Working Group is a group of leaders of professional groups who represent diverse approaches to collaboration in public policy debates, but share a distinctive professional mission: helping people work together in the face of serious differences on issues of public importance. The Working Group has come together to advance the understanding and use of collaboration in the public sphere. The list of members is included below.

Principles: Bringing people together for constructive conversation about public issues is not new; indeed it is probably one of the oldest of human activities. There is a wide range of existing tools and processes for collaboration work in the public arena. The Working Group has identified several hallmarks of good collaborative process that reflect the notion that creating forums for genuine communication, study and collaborative work produces significant benefits.

- **Direct interaction and communication.** Opportunities for constructive interaction are at the core of collaboration and dispute resolution. While communications and internet technologies help reach large numbers of people, they are usually best used to augment face-to-face dialogue and problem solving.
- **Diversity of views.** Inclusive approaches to participation make sure all points of view among those affected are welcome and encouraged. Extra effort is frequently needed to ensure that sufficiently diverse views are represented, giving everyone the confidence that the major perspectives will be thoroughly discussed.
- **“Done with, not done to.”** Collaboration creates forums where parties can work together voluntarily and have a voice in shaping the process itself. Suspicion and conflict are reduced if the structure and goals are transparent and not open to manipulation by one interest.
- **Timely information.** Timely information that is accessible, both in terms of availability and understanding, helps ensure that all parties are empowered to be full participants and that factual issues are resolved in ways that are expeditious and clear to all.
- **Mutually beneficial results.** Participants in any effort ask the basic question: does this outcome help achieve my goals? Collaborative efforts consciously work to ensure that the results are beneficial for all.
- **Focus on results and action.** A good collaborative process keeps participants focused on achieving sustainable results – whether that result is improved relationships or actions that resolve problems. Clarity about the purpose of the effort is critical to matching the process to the desired results.

Approaches to Collaboration: The Working Group recognized that the diversity and multiplicity of approaches and practices for building consensus and collaboration on public issues can be confusing to those who seek to sponsor or structure collaborative efforts for specific situations. Working Group members developed an overview spectrum of the purposes, outcomes and prerequisites for success for various approaches to collaboration. The spectrum is being used in education and discussion forums with the members of the Working Group organizations and professional groups and appears below.

Collaboration on Public Issues in the Future: There is a growing recognition that the roles for dialogue and collaboration about public concerns are going to increase in coming years. Politically involved action groups, for example AARP, are using dialogue to build public consensus on economic and health policy in the US. Collaborative structures are being set up to focus the energy of corporations or NGOs on addressing climate change. Expertise in structuring collaborative forums and conversations is needed, whether through the use of impartial collaborative specialists, or through the skills of those working in the collaborative forums to self guide the collaboration.

The variety of opportunities for collaboration points to the need for increasing the knowledge, skills, and abilities for collaboration among those seeking to make progress through collaboration and dialogue on difficult public issues.

List of Members

Peter Adler, Keystone Center

Gail Bingham, RESOLVE

Chris Carlson, Policy Consensus Institute

Susan Carpenter, Independent Facilitator

Cindy Cook, Adamant Accord and Association for Conflict Resolution

Frank Dukes, Institute for Environmental Negotiation, UVA

Don Edwards, Justice & Sustainability Associates

Michael Elliott, Environmental and Public Policy Section, Association for Conflict Resolution

Pat Field, Consensus Building Institute

Cameron Fraser, International Association of Facilitators

John Godec, International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Phil Harter, American Bar Association Administrative Law Section, and Center for Dispute Resolution, University of

Missouri Law School

Sandy Heierbacher, National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation

Maggie Herzig, Public Conversations Project

Matt Leighninger, Deliberative Democracy Consortium

Michael Lewis, JAMS

Carolyn Lukensmeyer, America Speaks

Raphael Montalvo, Florida CR Consortium

Lucy Moore, Independent Facilitator

Suzanne Orenstein, Independent Facilitator, Co-Chair of Working Group

Bill Potapchuk, Community Building Institute

Susan Sherry, Center for Collaborative Policy, CA State University, Sacramento

Larry Susskind, Consensus Building Institute/Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, MIT Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning, Co-Chair of Working Group

Elissa Tonkin, ADR Coordinator, U.S. EPA, New England

SPECTRUM OF PROCESSES FOR COLLABORATION AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING IN PUBLIC DECISIONS¹

	EXPLORE/INFORM	CONSULT	ADVISE	DECIDE	IMPLEMENT
Outcomes ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved understanding of issues, process, etc. Lists of concerns Information needs identified Explore differing perspectives Build relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments on draft policies Suggestions for approaches Priority concerns/issues Discussion of options Call for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus or majority recommendations, on options, proposals or actions, often directed to public entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus-based agreements among agencies and constituent groups on policies, lawsuits or rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-party agreements to implement collaborative action and strategic plans
Sample Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Groups Conferences Open houses Dialogues Roundtable Discussions Forums Summits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public meetings Workshops Charettes Town Hall Meetings (w & w/o deliberative polls) Community Visioning Scoping meetings Public Hearings Dialogues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory Committees Task Forces Citizen Advisory Boards Work Groups Policy Dialogues Visioning Processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory Negotiation Negotiated settlement of lawsuits, permits, cleanup plans, etc. Consensus meetings Mediated negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative Planning processes Partnerships for Action Strategic Planning Committees Implementation Committees

¹ Developed by Suzanne Orenstein, Lucy Moore, and Susan Sherry, members of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Future of Collaboration and Consensus on Public Issues, in consideration of and inspiration from the spectra developed by International Association for Public Involvement (http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf) and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (<http://www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/ddStreams1-08.pdf>).

² While all types of processes have intrinsic value on their own, outcomes from the various types of processes on the left side of the spectrum tend to be incorporated into the outcomes of the processes to the right. For example, information sharing and option identification usually occur as early stages in decision-focused processes.

Use When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in projects when issues are under development • When broad public education and support are needed • When stakeholders see need to connect, but are wary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to test proposals and solicit public and stakeholder ideas • Want to explore possibility of joint action before committing to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to develop agreement among various constituencies on recommendations, e.g. to public officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want certainty of implementation for a specific public decision • Conditions are there for successful negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to develop meaningful on-going partnership to solve a problem of mutual concern • To implement joint strategic action
Conditions for Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are questions or proposals for comment • Affected groups and/or the public are willing to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can represent broad spectrum of affected groups • Players agree to devote time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can represent all affected interests and potential “blockers” • All agree upfront to implement results, incl. “sponsor” • Time, information, incentives and resources are available for negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants agree to support the goal for the effort • Participants agree to invest time and resources • Conditions exist for successful negotiations

